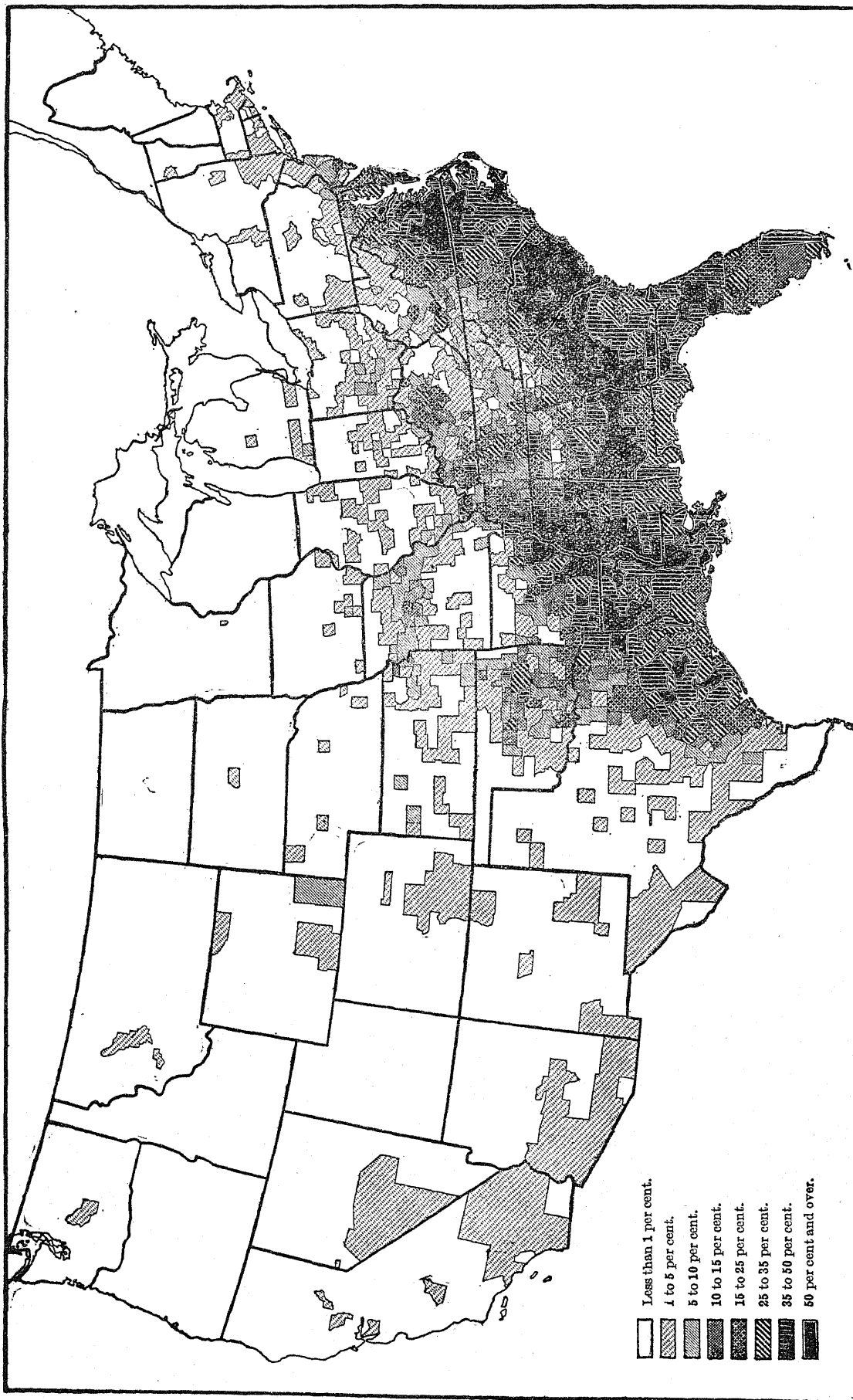

NEGRO POPULATION: 1790-1915

PERCENTAGE NEGRO IN THE POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES, BY COUNTIES, 1910.



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INTRODUCTION.

SOURCES AND SCOPE OF COMPILATIONS.

Statistics relating to the Negro population have been compiled in the present report from publications, schedules, and unpublished manuscript tables of the Census Bureau, covering the period of 125 years from 1790 to 1915. In part, therefore, the tabulations of the report are compilations which assemble and reorganize material previously published, and in part they are entirely original from records, manuscripts, and schedules.

Voluminous and fugitive records of a century and a quarter are summarized in these compilations, which in the aggregate present a statistical account of the Negro population, covering its racial experience under the conditions imposed by slavery and under the no less difficult conditions imposed by emancipation and freedom.

Specifically this statistical account comprehends the growth of the Negro population from decade to decade; its geographical distribution at each decennial enumeration; its migratory drift westward in the early decades of the last century, when Negroes and whites were moving forward into the East and West South Central states as cultivators of virgin soil; its drift northward and cityward, and in more recent decades southward out of the "black belt," in response to the universal gravity pull of complex economic and social forces; its widespread dispersion on the one hand, and on the other its segregation with reference to the white population; its sex and age composition and marital condition; its fertility, as indicated by the proportion of children to women of childbearing age in different periods—again, under social conditions varying from the irresponsible relations of slavery to the more exacting institutions of freedom; its intermixture with other races, as shown by the increase in the proportion mulatto; its annual mortality in the registration area; its educational progress since emancipation, in so far as this can be measured by elementary schooling and by increasing literacy; its criminality, dependency, and physical and mental defectiveness—those characteristics of individual de-

generacy which Negroes manifest in common with other racial classes in all civilized communities; finally, its economic progress, as indicated by increasing ownership of homes, by entrance into skilled trades and professions, and primarily and fundamentally by the rapid development of Negro agriculture..

Entirely new compilations have been made from manuscript tables and directly from schedules and records, relating especially to mortality, ownership of homes, and agriculture. The rapid development of Negro agriculture, as demonstrated in the statistics which show an increasing acreage and value for Negro farms, and an increasing value of live stock, crops, and farm property on such farms, seems extremely significant. This progress has provided a substantial basis for general social improvement in the recent past, and it is a sure guaranty of further improvement in the future.

DETAIL OF TABULATIONS FOR DIFFERENT YEARS.

As is true in the case of the white population, the statistics of the Negro population in the decennial census reports have tended to become, from census to census, more comprehensive and detailed, not only as regards diversity of topics covered by schedule inquiries, but also as regards completeness of compilation of the returns.

At the earlier censuses, returns relating to the slave and to the free colored population were generally restricted to a few simple inquiries. At the census of 1790, for example, the number of slaves was ascertained without distinction of either sex or age, and at each of the five succeeding censuses, 1800-1840, age was recorded for Negroes, free and slave, in less detail than for whites. At the censuses of 1850 and 1860, also, the returns for the slave population, which were made upon special schedules, were less detailed than were those secured for the free colored and white population. In 1870, however, since all Negroes were free, the returns for the total Negro population were made upon the schedule provided for all free inhabitants, and at this census as at each suc-

ceeding census they were made in the same detail for Negroes as for whites.

It is true generally, also, that in the published population reports of the census, beginning with that of 1870, so far as the schedule inquiries are applicable to Negroes, practically the same detail is shown for Negroes as for whites.

REORGANIZATION OF MATERIAL.

The compilations for Negroes of the returns at the census of 1910 are in fact scattered through the seven quarto volumes constituting the general report of the Thirteenth Census on Population, Occupations, and Agriculture, averaging more than a thousand pages per volume. Similarly, for other census years, also, returns relating to Negroes are scattered through volumes of general reports. Data relating to mortality of Negroes in the registration area are contained in the annual mortality reports compiled by the Bureau of the Census, which constitute a series of publications entirely separate from the reports of the decennial census.

It will be apparent that the process of assembling these data itself involves original compilations and rearrangements of statistical material, since the figures relating to Negroes can not generally be mechanically cut out of tables which present statistics for the Negro population as a component element in the total population. A mechanical excision of the data for Negroes from these tables would yield an aggregation of statistical fragments more or less unrelated, unintelligible, and insignificant.

The assembling and presentation of statistics for Negroes clearly involves a selection of such numbers, proportions, and ratios for other classes as are required for interpretation of figures specifically for Negroes and the rejection of all other data. It is, however, seldom the case that any important series of figures for another class is entirely without significance when it is related to a similar series for Negroes. Generally such totals, and especially all derived figures, are of greater or less significance, and selections must be made accordingly, in each case by the exercise of judgment as to what numbers, proportions, and ratios are of sufficient import specifically for Negroes to justify quotation. Finally, new analyses are frequently required to insure a fair degree of comparability of data for different years.

Consistently with the purpose of the report to present the economic and social progress of the Negro

population, in so far as that progress can be statistically determined, practically all of the tabulations included institute comparisons, either of present conditions with those obtaining in the past among Negroes, or of Negro characteristics and tendencies with those of other racial classes—comparisons, it may be noted, which have frequently involved new combinations of data for classes other than Negro and the computation of new percentages and ratios.

EMANCIPATION AND SOCIAL PROGRESS.

The compilations of the report for the most part relate to the period since emancipation, but in some detail the statistical record embraces also the period of slavery. Where it does so bridge the gap between slavery and freedom, not the least interesting fact established by the record is the unbroken persistence and gradual modification of racial characteristics and tendencies in the face of extreme social changes. No very extraordinary irregularities in the series of figures extending back into the first half of the nineteenth century mark the years of transition from slavery to freedom. Social betterment has been, not an immediate and direct consequence of a boon conferred upon the race in a given year, but rather a somewhat deferred and indirect consequence which appears in the record as an achievement of the race from decade to decade. Aggregate improvement has been substantial and progress from decade to decade has been at an accelerating rate.

Slavery, emancipation, and a half-century experience of freedom are the large facts in the history of the Negro population, and although the statistical evidence of racial progress are relatively few in the earlier decades of the period following emancipation—chiefly, it may be, because of incompleteness of the record for those years—and although these evidences are largely cumulated in recent decades, it is nevertheless important in interpreting the whole record that the date of the great event, which is still a living memory in the minds of both Negroes and whites, be kept in mind. For, however much deferred, the whole amount of racial progress must be measured by reference to the original status under slavery, and by taking account of the extreme brevity of the period comprehending this progress, when the period is measured in terms of racial rather than of individual improvement.